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ABSTRACT

This publication is intended for teachers bringing a class to visit the National Archives in Washington, D.C., for a workshop on primary documents. The National Archives serves as the repository for all federal records of enduring value. Primary sources are vital teaching tools because they actively engage the student's imagination so that he or she may visualize past events and make sense of their reality and meaning. This publication concerns a workshop on the American Revolution. Background information is provided on the Revolution and on two documents included in the workshop: the painting, "The Surrender of General Burgoyne at Saratoga" (by John Trumbull), and the Warrant of Simon Fobes. Photographs of the documents are included as well as student exercises that focus on each document. (DB)

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"Simon Fobes Goes to War"

The Life of a Revolutionary War Soldier

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"Simon Fobes Goes to War"

The Life of a Revolutionary War Soldier

FOR THE TEACHER

Thank you for arranging for your class the primary document workshop "Simon Fobes Goes to War." For too many students, history is just an endless string of dates and events chronicled in a textbook. Primary sources actively engage the student's imagination so that he or she may visualize past events and sense their reality and meaning. Before your workshop, it would be advantageous to introduce your students to primary sources with the poster-size documents and the attendant exercises we have provided. The exercises may be photocopied and should be adapted to fit your objectives and teaching style. We hope that these preliminary materials and our workshop will enhance your class's understanding and appreciation of America's Revolutionary fight for freedom.

The American Revolution

When George III came to the throne in 1760, scarcely anyone in England or America foresaw independence for the 13 British colonies in North America. Colonists were proud of their affiliation with Great Britain and satisfied with the prosperity they enjoyed as part of Britain's commercial empire. From the Sugar Act in 1764 to the Intolerable Acts of 1774, this relationship between Britain and the colonies steadily deteriorated into a condition that Edmund Burke in 1775 described as "unalterable by any human art. . . . An Englishman is the unfittest person on earth to argue another Englishman into slavery." When the colonists, or Englishmen, as Burke put it, found themselves relegated to a position of inferiority by Parliament, it was inevitable that trouble would ensue, that the slogan "No taxation without representation" would become commonplace, and that the "shot heard round the world" would soon ring out.

Two years had passed since those first shots at Lexington. The Revolution was gathering strength, and the issue that would decide the outcome of the war became evident. Could the British score such a success in putting down the American revolt that the French would not dare enter the war openly to aid the American rebels?

In 1777 British Maj. Gen. John Burgoyne concluded that the strategic key to this success was British control of the interior water route between New York and the St. Lawrence River. His "Thoughts for Conducting the War from the side of Canada" called for his army, Col. Barry St. Leger's army, and Gen. William Howe's army to divide New England, the heart of the rebellion, from the colonies farther south. Burgoyne thought that this division of the rebellion would go a long way toward ending it. The plan, however, required the closest coordination between the three armies, and this, as it turned out, was its fatal flaw.

Burgoyne had started with the rapid and easy capture of the American fort at Ticonderoga. Thereafter, however, Burgoyne soon ran into trouble, for the American Gen. Philip Schuyler diligently obstructed the already bad roads between Lake Champlain and the Hudson with entanglements of felled trees, which slowed the British pace to a mile a day. Already moving too slowly through desolate wilderness, Burgoyne was approaching the exhaustion of his supplies and was forced to send the entire left wing of his army to seize badly needed provisions at Bennington. There, militia under the command of John Stark annihilated this troop detachment.

By mid-September, Burgoyne's army was so depleted (to about half its original numbers) and so exhausted from constant American harassment and lack of supplies, that Maj. Gen. Horatio Gates and the northern portion of the American Army dared to take a stand from a fortified position on Bemis Heights overlooking the Hudson to block Burgoyne's southern movement. St. Leger's incompetence and miscommunication with Howe precluded the possibility of a relief effort, so Burgoyne launched two last-ditch attacks on the impregnable position; the Battles of Freeman's Farm and Bemis Heights proved unmitigated disasters for the British.

Two days after Bemis Heights, his position hopeless, Burgoyne finally capitulated on October 17, 1777, at Saratoga. The surrender of an entire British army with all its equipment had a tremendous psychological impact on the American cause. What had been at stake soon became obvious, however. In February 1778 France signed a treaty pledging full military support to the American states, tantamount to a declaration of war against England.

The Surrender of General Burgoyne at Saratoga

by John Trumbull

The document on the front of your poster depicts one of the "two military subjects paramount to all others" as stated and painted by statesman-artist John Trumbull. On February 6, 1817, the Congress authorized President Madison "to employ the aforesaid John Trumbull, to compose and execute four paintings, commemorative of the most important events of the American revolution, to be placed when finished in the capitol of the United States." Trumbull completed *The Surrender of General Burgoyne at Saratoga* in 1821, and a copy of the work resides in the Still Picture Branch of the National Archives. The focal point of Trumbull's painting depicts Burgoyne offering his sword to Gates. Also featured prominently, because of their considerable contributions in battle, are Daniel Morgan and Philip Schuyler, shown at right by the cannon. Conspicuously absent among the American participants is Benedict Arnold. Trumbull chose Saratoga as his subject because it was, in his words, "a circumstance without parallel" and thus "indispensable" when portraying the most important events of the American Revolution. The significance of Saratoga is as poignant today as it was then. An analysis of this painting provides you with an opportunity to discuss with your students the ramifications of this momentous event.

The Warrant of Simon Fobes

During the 1820s a growing spirit of nationalism took hold in the United States, and the Revolution took on a romantic aspect in the minds of Americans who had not lived through the conflict. The youngest veterans were in their sixties, grandfathers with stories to tell, and the country was wealthy and secure enough to show its gratitude. In 1832 Congress passed the first comprehensive pension act, providing a yearly grant to every man who had served for 6 months or more. To be eligible, a soldier no longer had to be disabled or poor; service in any military organization was satisfactory, as long as this service could be proved beyond a reasonable doubt.

The document on the back of your poster is a copy of the warrant (a certificate of rank for noncommissioned officers) that Sgt. Simon Fobes submitted to prove his eligibility under the Pension Act of 1832. The warrant's unofficial drawings make it unique among the many historically valuable military pension records kept at the National Archives. It is an excellent example of how military pension records enable students to look through the romantic haze that has settled down over the history of the Revolution since the 1820s. The Revolution was not a pageant of patriotic demigods, but like all wars, it was a hard, wearing, bloody, and tragic business—a struggle to the death. The struggle, furthermore, was fought out by people very much like ourselves, people who were often confused and usually divided in sentiment. It comes as a shock to realize how many Americans in 1775 were actually opposed to independence. Many historians conclude that no more than a third of the colonists were active patriots, another third were Loyalists, with the remaining third uncommitted. The fact that a Tory and not a redcoat hangs from the gallows in the Simon Fobes's warrant provides your students with a glimpse behind the great struggle with the professional armies of England. The continuing struggle between patriot and Loyalist was a civil war just as real and bitter as the one which broke in 1861 and one that continued along the western frontier after the peace treaty with England.

What is the National Archives?

Established in 1934, the National Archives helps preserve our nation's history by serving as the repository for all federal records of enduring value. It thus serves the federal government, researchers of many topics, and the American public. Because the federal records reflect and document more than 200 years of American development, the records in the National Archives holdings are great in number, diverse in character, and rich in information.

Before your students participate in a tour or a workshop, they should be familiar with the mission of the National Archives. We recommend that you present your students with the following vocabulary words and questions:

- *Please define Archives, Archivist, Document, Record, Preservation.*
- *Why do you and your family save documents? Why are they important?*
- *The U.S. government keeps its records in the National Archives.*
  Why does the government save its records?
- *What kinds of records might the U.S. government want to save?*
- *What famous documents are at the National Archives?*

You will be called by the National Archives docent assigned to your class about a week before the date of your tour or workshop. If the workshop will be held in your classroom, then please be prepared to relay information concerning directions, parking, and school check-in procedures.

Whether it is our Behind-the-Scenes Tour or one of our Primary Document Workshops, we are confident that the experience will provide an exciting new look at history. In order to assess our performance, we would appreciate your cooperation in completing the enclosed evaluation form and returning it in the self-addressed stamped envelope provided.

If you have any additional questions regarding your tour or workshop, please contact the Volunteer and Tour Office Staff at 202-501-5205.

Exercise I:

The Surrender of General Burgoyne at Saratoga
by John Trumbull

On the basis of what you know about the American Revolution and your examination of the painting, form an interpretation of what is taking place and its significance.

1. What is the date of the event being portrayed? _____

2. Which figures in the painting stand out? _____

3. Why has the artist given them these important positions? _____

_____

4. Who is the commander of the British Army? Who is the commander of the American Army?

_____

5. What symbolic act lets us know a surrender is taking place? _____

_____

6. Did the artist create this painting as the event took place? If not, then how could he recreate something he had never seen?

_____

_____

7. Why was this event so important for the American cause during the Revolution?

_____

_____

_____

8. In addition to the help of the French, what other reasons can you give for the American victory in the Revolutionary War?

_____

_____

_____

Exercise II:

The Warrant of Simon Fobes

Read and examine the written document and its drawings.

1. How old is the document? _____

2. What important events occurred in the 13 colonies during the year the document was issued?

_____

_____

3. What was the purpose of this warrant? _____

_____

4. Who issued it? _____

5. What rank did Simon Fobes attain? In what state militia did he serve?

_____

6. Why did Simon Fobes send his warrant to the U.S. government?

_____

_____

_____

7. What do the drawings depict? _____

8. Why does a Tory and not a redcoat hang in the drawing? What does this tell you about the nature of the Revolutionary War?

_____

_____

_____

The Surrender of General Burgoyne at Saratoga
by John Trumbull

Photograph in the National Archives

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The Warrant of Simon Fobes

National Archives

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Roger Enos Esq. Colonel of the first Battalion of
New Levies from the State of Connecticut

To Simon Tobes.

Reposing especial Trust & Confidence in Your Skill Courage & Good Conduct I do Appoint Authorize & Constitute You the said Simon Tobes, Serjeant in said Regement all the Duties of Which Office You are faithfully to Discharge & You are to Obey all Your Superior Officers in All their Commands According to Military Discipline & All Under You are to Obey You as their Serjeant & for Your So doing this Shall be Your Sufficient

WARRANT

Given Under my hand this 7th day of September AD 1776.

Roger Enos Col

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